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Rebekah McCloud

University of Central Florida

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You Are the Momma Now

By Rebekah McCloud
UCF Forum columnist
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I am a proud member of the sandwich generation. Sociologist Dorothy A. Miller coined the term in 1981 to classify people who care for their aging parent(s) while helping to support their own children.

A [recent analysis](#) of Census Bureau data by the Pew Research Center noted that nearly half (47 percent) of Americans aged 47-59 have a parent at least 65-years-old and are also raising a minor child or provide support to a grown child. Additionally, 15 percent of that age group in the past year provided financial support to parents at least 65-years old and a child. There are close to 14 million adult children still living at home and 36 percent of those 18-31 are still living with their parents.

These are compelling statistics that will increase exponentially in the next decade or two when Baby Boomers become the “aging parents.”

Nationally known elder-care authority Carol Abaya coined the term “club sandwich” to describe people in their 50s and 60s with adult children, grandchildren and aging parents. This describes me, too. However, there’s another layer to me. I am a multilayered sandwich with a variety of fillings: I am a Dagwood. This kind of sandwich was made popular by Dagwood Bumstead, one of the main characters in Chic Young’s comic strip, Blondie.

Recently my three siblings came over to visit Momma, who is 90. We had a terrific evening of food, laughter and stories for time long passed. The next morning over coffee, Momma said: “That was a fun night, wasn’t it?”

I agreed.

She continued, “I was so happy to see all of my children together. I watched you all and it became as clear as day to me that you are the momma now.”

I interrupted in protest: “Oh, Momma, that’s not true. You are the momma and will always be the momma. Nobody can take your place.”

She placed her hand on mine and said, “Let me finish. I know I will always be Mom, but you are the Momma. I know you can’t take my place. You have your own place. Your brothers and sister look up to you. They come to you with problems and joys. They love me alright, but you are first. And I am right there with them. I have gotten old and I am one of the children now. We need you and I pray that God will bless you and keep you strong.”

She was silent for a long while.

In her silence, I understood Momma’s intention. She was passing the mantle of matriarch on to me. I thought about the conversation for many days after that morning. I even called my siblings and talked with them about it. They all affirmed Momma’s assessment of the situation: I am the Momma now.

So, Ms. Abaya, I offer Dagwood as an additional kind of family sandwich. I am sure I am not alone. Family defined as mom, dad and kids is not necessarily the norm anymore. Just watch television any day of the week and you will find that there are a myriad of configurations that comprise family. Boy, do I know this to be true. I have become the matriarch of my extended family: I am the Momma now.

With the care and leadership for my Mom, children and grandchildren, I’ve added my siblings, their children and grandchildren. This is an awesome responsibility and a tremendous opportunity to learn, to teach, to mentor, to encourage, to nurture, and to love. I pray I don’t disappoint.

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Rebekah McCloud is director of the University of Central Florida's PRIME STEM/Student Support Services Program. She can be reached at Rebekah.McCloud@ucf.edu.